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American Planning Association Conference Showcases Potential Solutions to Lake County Traffic Congestion

DENVER, CO – About 140 years ago, pioneers forged America's future via wagon trains headed west. Some settled at the foothills of the Rocky Mountains in Denver, Colorado. That pioneer spirit was on display last week at the American Planning Association Conference in Denver (March 27-April 2). With congestion corralling traffic nationwide, planners from across America discovered first hand, in the Denver Metro Area, how a new planning trend, "Transit-Oriented Development," may spell relief.

Transit-Oriented Development is sure to be a topic of considerable debate as Lake County's 20 year "Regional Framework Plan" is completed before the end of 2003. When it comes to commuting, Lake County residents are not strangers to "Rugged Individualism."

"The growing traffic problem is first or second on nearly everyone's list when we discuss long range planning. It was inspiring to see real world solutions that hold *so* much promise," Planning Director Philip Rovang said. "When we discuss our transportation chapter this summer, Transit-Oriented Development may have real implications for future development in Lake County."

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Conference Showcases Potential Solutions to Lake County Traffic – 2 of 3

The highlight of the conference for several Lake County staff members and planning commissioners was a tour of Englewood, CO. This working class suburb of Denver, consisting of mostly small single-family homes, has just completed a mixed-use development that has, in essence, created a vibrant downtown on the site of an old shopping mall that had fallen into disrepair.

The Englewood example has retail shopping space on the ground level of the newly constructed urban styled buildings with upscale condo development above. Dispelling the popular notion that small retail cannot exist in the shadow of big-box national chains, a Wal-Mart was incorporated into the mixed-use plan.

The lynch pin of the development is the light-rail terminal just a short walk from the condos. It whisks commuters to the heart of downtown Denver in less than 20 minutes. The cost of a ride is only \$1.15 each way.

“I was skeptical [about Transit Oriented Development], but every once in a while you see something that has the potential to really change your mind. There are issues to overcome for the Denver model to work in Lake County, but we have several locations in the county where Transit-Oriented Development could apply. With the Regional Framework Plan being written now, there is no better time to consider this option. We’re counting on the public to join the debate,” Regional Planning Commission member Jordan Madorsky added.

In addition to staff, Regional Planning Commission members John Thomas and Jordan Madorsky and Lake County Board Member Pamela Newton attended the APA conference.

The Lake County Planning, Building, and Development Department is responsible for county zoning issues, as well as short and long range planning.

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Planning, Building and Development Department offices are on the 6th floor of the Lake County Courthouse and Administrative Complex, 18 N. County Street, Waukegan, 60085.

For additional information, please contact Dennis Sandquist, Deputy Director of Planning, Building and Development at (847) 377-2388 or email planning@co.lake.il.us.

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